

■ Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History

About Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History

Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History is a project of the Heritage Committee of Convocation of the Law Society of Upper Canada. It is a modest effort to address big themes from historical and biographical perspectives. It is an attempt to enrich the history of the legal profession in Ontario by identifying and preserving the names and brief histories of the path-breaking lawyers of diverse communities.

From its beginnings in 1797 until at least the 1970s, the great majority of members of the legal profession of Ontario have been Anglophone men. By 2010, more women, people of colour, and individuals from a variety of traditions, cultures and groups are becoming lawyers than ever before.

It is important to celebrate these changes within the legal profession and the communities themselves. These path-breaking lawyers have made history not simply because they changed the face of the legal profession in Ontario. Many served and still serve as leading advocates for their communities, not the least by delivering legal services and rights to communities whose access to the law is otherwise limited.

Diversification of the bar has been a positive and important development in the history of access to justice and the law, but it is not complete: despite recent gains, most diverse communities, especially peoples of colour, still produce far fewer lawyers than their share of the population. The under-representation extends beyond rates of admission. Compared to Anglophone male lawyers, early lawyers of diverse groups still work for lower earnings; they are more often found in sole and small firm practice and in government, and specialize in less lucrative fields of law.¹ They also tend to leave the profession at a greater rate than Anglophone male members. In the past, their isolation and marginal status sometimes resulted in difficult relationships with the Law Society. The challenges as well as successes of path-breaking lawyers should be remembered, because diversification is an ongoing process.

Through biographical snapshots of lawyers living and deceased, therefore, this project identifies and remembers the men and women who diversified the bar in Ontario.

In summary, through the biographies of early and exceptional lawyers, we hope,

- to recognize the challenges and celebrate the accomplishments of path-breaking lawyers of diverse communities;

¹ See Michael Ornstein, "Racialization and Gender of Lawyers in Ontario," (Law Society of Upper Canada, April 2010). http://www.lsuc.on.ca/media/convapril10_ornstein.pdf

- to encourage research into the lives of lawyers who helped change the profession; and
- to underline that discrimination is not a phenomenon only of the distant past; that it takes and has taken a variety of forms, some formal, such as barriers to entry and others more subtle.

To identify early and exceptional lawyers from diverse communities, the Law Society has relied on community members, legal and cultural associations and others to make nominations. This will be an ongoing undertaking, and we encourage you to submit names of lawyers who come within the scope of the project. In addition to updating the list of names and brief biographies, the Diversifying the Bar project will be conducting and recording a small number of group and individual interviews with lawyers, and encouraging others to capture their personal and professional experiences by writing their memoirs.

Defining the Diverse Communities

For the purposes of this project, lawyers of diverse communities are those who are not of Anglophone heritage, or are Anglophone but also belong to another religious, ethnic or cultural community. This is not to suggest that lawyers from Anglo-American backgrounds do not merit attention; the history of all lawyers (as opposed to the history of the law) is an understudied field. (See [For More Information](#) for a brief bibliography.)

Diverse communities include Aboriginal peoples, made up of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. Visible minorities, also referred to as people of colour, are those who are neither Aboriginal nor of European origin (although some Europeans in the past were not considered to be “white”). The phrase, “racialized communities,” includes both Aboriginal peoples and people of colour.² The term, “diverse communities,” also includes ethnocultural groups who share or shared a language, history, geographic origin, nationality, and/or religion; these communities, whether of the past or present, have experienced discrimination of varying degrees from the established legal profession. Groups differentiated by disability, gender or sexual orientation also count as diverse communities; “women lawyers,” for instance, is listed in this project publications as a separate diverse community, and does not necessarily include female lawyers of other diverse communities who were early path-breakers.

Unlike some projects undertaken by the Law Society, *Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History* is not a statistical or sociological study - the focus is on personal, not collective, history. Therefore, the terminology used by Statistics Canada to name diverse communities is not necessarily followed here. It is important to note, for example, that lawyers were asked to describe their own identities; their choices, where they differ from the standard names for groups, are retained in the individual biographies.

² For terminology typically used by Statistics Canada and the Law Society of Upper Canada in its reports, see Ornstein, 1.

Identifying the Early and Exceptional Lawyers

For as many diverse groups as possible, the goal is to identify not only the first male and first female lawyers, but the first few members of the first generation or cohort. This is because the work of diversifying the bar is rarely done by one individual, though only one might be remembered. In addition to the early lawyers, to the project seeks to recognize exceptional lawyers - those distinguished by their path-breaking achievements within the legal field. Examples are the first lawyers from a diverse community who were appointed to the judiciary or as King's or Queen's Counsel, the first law professors, crown attorneys, legal authors, or those who broke new ground in a field of law. Other lawyers have been included because of their service to their community of origin beyond their professional capacity or to the wider society. These individuals may be community leaders, politicians, activists against discrimination, or advocates for the disadvantaged.

The project manager contacted a wide range of legal and community organizations affiliated with specific diverse communities and invited them to suggest the names of early and exceptional lawyers from their communities. Then she asked those nominated to try to remember names of those who had preceded them as lawyers from their communities.

The lists were supplemented with primary research in the Law Society Archives, in newspapers, and in secondary sources. However, Law Society files on past lawyers are usually thin except for prominent legal achievers. It is also difficult to identify individuals who anglicized their surnames and therefore to know their communities of origin.

The result is a non-definitive set of short biographies of lawyers from a wide variety of communities. Summary tables are included mostly as guides to the biographies, but the visitor should remember that this is not a study based on sampling. The representation of diverse groups varies considerably from group to group, and depends partly on the availability of primary and secondary sources and partly on the response from organizations associated with the communities.

Specifically, the biographies include many of the early Greek, Dutch, South Asian, Chinese and Jewish lawyers of Ontario, thanks to the assistance of community and legal organizations. (Please see [Acknowledgements](#) for the list of participating individuals and organizations.) The first generation of women lawyers was also easy to name. However, path-breakers from a number of racialized groups – Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian, Armenian and other West Asian, and Latin American – have not yet been identified. Of the ethnocultural groups of European origin, the early and exceptional lawyers of Southern Europe including Spanish and Portuguese communities, and many Eastern European communities, are missing. Other groups - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered lawyers (the LGBT community), and Persons with Disabilities - are under-represented. For almost all groups, the first few female lawyers are elusive. An additional project goal is to identify more early lawyers of diverse communities who practised outside of Toronto, in smaller cities and towns in the province. In general, lawyers who have had exceptional careers have been simpler to locate than the early lawyers, with the exception of the first lawyer, of any given diverse community.

An overview of the [history of diversification](#) of the profession is available as part of these webpages.

This project is ongoing, and will become the responsibility of the Law Society of Upper Canada Archives, whose mandate is to ensure the preservation of the heritage of the legal profession in Ontario. To make the roll of early and exceptional lawyers of diverse communities as complete and accurate as possible, please [make a suggestion](#).

The Biographies and Tables

For each individual on the list of early and exceptional lawyers of diverse communities, there are basic biographical facts and a short biography (up to 150 words but often only a few words long.) Living lawyers wrote or edited their own biographical details, including the name or names of their diverse community, and gave permission to have their information published in these pages. (Lawyers who were invited to participate but have not yet responded are not in this list.)

If you'd like to browse the full biographies of lawyers, see:

Biographies of Early and Exceptional Lawyers of Diverse Communities Arranged By Year Called to the Bar

The biographies are ordered chronologically, by year called to the bar, then alphabetically by last name.

For each lawyer, these documents offer some or all of the following information:

- name
- gender
- year and place of birth
- year of death where applicable
- year called to the bar in Ontario (and/or, until 1889, the year admitted to the courts as a solicitor; from 1889, all lawyers admitted to practice were admitted as both barristers and solicitors, and all were called to the bar)
- whether appointed KC or QC
- name of diverse community or heritage
- biographical notes
- name of nominating person or organization if relevant
- sources used in preparing the biography
- suggestions for further reading, and
- photograph, usually taken in year called to the bar (available only for photographs taken before 1948 because of copyright restrictions).

If you wish to focus on lawyers from specific communities, see:

Biographies of Early and Exceptional Lawyers of Diverse Communities Arranged by Community

Lawyers are grouped by their community or heritage, arranged by name of the community in alphabetical order. (Some lawyers are members of more than one diverse community). Lawyers are ordered by the year the individual was admitted to the profession in Ontario. The entries include all of the information as described above, but without photographs. Lawyers associated with more than one community will have more than one entry.

If you are interested in gender and the legal profession, choose:

Early and Exceptional Female Lawyers of Diverse Communities

Or

Early and Exceptional Male Lawyers of Diverse Communities

Within each file, lawyers are listed by year admitted to the profession, then by name. The entry for each lawyer includes the name of the diverse community or communities, year of birth, and year of death where applicable.

For a list of all the lawyers included in this project by name, choose:

Alphabetical List of Early and Exceptional Lawyers of Diverse Communities

All early and exceptional lawyers of diverse communities whose biographies are included in this project are listed here, ordered alphabetically by last then first name. The entry on each lawyer also includes gender, birth and death years where relevant, year called to the bar, and name of diverse community.

Contact Us

We'd like to hear from you! Please [contact us](#):

- if you would like to suggest the name of an early or exceptional lawyer of a diverse community
- if you can add or correct information to the biographies presented here
- if you would like to submit a photograph
- if you have any comments about the Diversifying the Bar project